

Islamic Studies at the Asia Africa Institute, Hamburg University

A Series of Online Presentations on Recent and ongoing research projects

Tuesdays, 1 to 2 pm CET (30 minutes online presentation, 30 minutes Q&A)

Schedule:

09.11.2021 Konrad Hirschler, “The documentary and bookish culture of medieval Jerusalem”

16.11.2021 Zahir Bhalloo, „Persian Documents from al-haram al-sharif“ (DFG)

23.11.2021 Stefan Heidemann „The Islamic Empire at Work“ (ERC Advanced Grant)

30.11.2021 Stefan Heidemann/Sabine Panzram „RomanIslam – Center for comparative Empire and transcultural studies“ (DFG)

07.12.2021 Alba Fedeli, „The intertwined world of the oral and written transmission of sacred traditions in the Middle East“ (AHRC – DFG)

14.12.2021 Thomas Eich, „Contemporary Bioethics and the History of the Unborn in Islam“ (COBHUNI) (ERC Consolidator Grant)

11.01.2022 Hannah-Lena Hagemann, “Social Contexts of Rebellion in the Early Islamic Period (SCORE)“ (DFG Emmy Noether Group)

18.01.2022 Maxim Romanov, “The Evolution of Islamic Societies (c.600-1600 CE): Algorithmic Analysis into Social History” (DFG Emmy Noether Group)

The presentations will be recorded and put on the Institute Website later

Free registration at t.eich.project.aai@uni-hamburg.de

A link will be sent in due course

There is no registration deadline



Universität Hamburg

DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

09.11.2021 Konrad Hirschler, “The documentary and bookish culture of medieval Jerusalem”

Bio: As a historian of the medieval Middle East I work in particular on Egypt and Syria between c. 1100 and 1500. In my research and teaching I have shifted over the years between five principal themes: historiography, the history of reading and book culture, methodological issues linked to documentary sources and archives, Crusades, and finally the interplay between marginal groups and mainstream society. My next book project (with Said Aljoumani) *Owning Books and Preserving Documents in Medieval Jerusalem – The Library of Burhan al-Din al-Nasiri* (forthcoming 2022) explores the bookshelves and the private archive of a minor scholar from fourteenth-century Jerusalem.

Research: My research on reading and libraries has been closely linked to the question of pre-modern information management in a larger sense, most importantly the transmission of manuscripts and medieval archival practices. My current project is thus concerned with a close reading of a set of documents from medieval Jerusalem that give a unique insight into the social agency of commoners who skilfully navigated the town’s landscape of endowments. The book project aims to show a world of dense paperwork that permeated large sections of society and it brings to light the rich bookshelves in private homes. This is an exploration of the meaning of social practices that have so far remained below the radar of scholarship to bring to life what it meant to handle documents and to own books beyond courts and palaces.

16.11.2021 Zahir Bhalloo, „Persian Documents from al-haram al-sharif“ (DFG)

Bio: Zahir Bhalloo received his PhD in Oriental Studies at Oxford with a dissertation on judicial practice in 19th century Iran. His research interests are Codicology of Islamic Documents, Persian and Arabic legal and administrative documents, archival practices (11th c.-modern period), Islamic sharia court practice in Iran (1500-1925), Socio-religious dynamics of Ismaili and Twelver Shi‘i communities in Oman and Zanzibar (18th c. -modern period).

Research: Research in the field of Islamic studies has recently witnessed a renewed interest in the study of Islamic documents as historical sources. Scholars have turned their attention to documenting the “archival practices” of institutional and non-institutional actors in the Islamic world based on a study of the materiality of surviving documentary corpora. The proposed project examines a unique sub-corpus of 78 Persian and Arabic documents dating from 1300-1353 which form part of the Haram al-sharif collection of over 900 Islamic documents from fourteenth-century Jerusalem. This neglected and unstudied sub-corpus originated in North West Iran before ending up in fourteenth-century Mamluk Jerusalem. The project will study the origins, circulation and archival logic behind the formation of this “foreign” sub-corpus and its integration into the larger “local” Haram collection. In addition, by comparing documents of the sub-corpus with similar documents from Afghanistan and Ardabil, it will shed new light on the vernacularization of administrative and legal practice from Arabic to Persian under Mongol rule in North West Iran in the fourteenth century.

23.11.2021 Stefan Heidemann „The Islamic Empire at Work“ (ERC Advanced Grant)

Bio: Over the past years, I have become known as a historian of the Middle East who has an equal command of the study of literary and legal sources, material culture, numismatics, and archaeological evidence. I focus mainly on periods of transition and economic and cultural change in Islamic societies. Most prominent among my studies figure the formation of the early Islamic Empire, the apogee of the Abbasid Empire and the formation of the Middle Islamic civilization in the 12th and 13th centuries. I work with archaeological missions from Portugal to Mongolia, yet most of whom excavate in Syria.

Research: In my past project "The Early Islamic Empire at Work - The View from the Regions Toward the Center" (ERC Advanced Grant) the ambitious aim was to understand the political and economic workings of a pre-modern empire, the Islamic Empire (660-940 C.E.), which stretches over almost the entire Hellenistic-Roman world from the Atlantic to the Hindukush. In contrast to the conventional model of an empire founded on a religious revelation, the project is the first systematic attempt to explain the functioning of the empire from its regions and the brokering and management abilities of the caliphate with its various elites.

While usually we have a top-down approach as seen from the center, this project takes the view from the regions, to explain the functioning of the caliphal government. The project looks at five key regions from North Africa to Central Asia, establishing their changing political and economic structures and chronologies, and identifying transregional political, military, judicial, and indigenous elites. The tested hypothesis expects to see the central caliphal government in a more conscious role as moderator between the regions than has hitherto been recognized. In order to shift our understanding of the functioning of the empire from a chronicle-driven top-down view to a region-driven view, a multidisciplinary and multilayered approach seems to be most appropriate.

30.11.2021 Stefan Heidemann/Sabine Panzram „RomanIslam – Center for comparative Empire and transcultural studies“ (DFG)

Research: A comparative study of empire, approached by transcultural assimilation processes in what was historically a close-knit region – the western Mediterranean – through the example of the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa is to be the substance of research. The region forms part of larger political, economic, and religious structures of western Europe and West Africa. The period for research is the first millennium, the so-called Long Late Antiquity, which also encompasses the Early Islamic period.

The RomanIslam Center will connect debates concerning fundamental research issues, methodology, and positions in the field of Romanization and Islamization that have long been conducted parallel to one another in separate disciplines. It will also generate new empirical information for the research fields. From its thematic compass of the western Mediterranean, it will contribute new models and theories to the field of transcultural and comparative empire studies. This combination of approaches has the potential to remedy contemporary associations of Romanization and Islamization as “pre-modern forms of colonization.” In turn, current theories and models on transculturality and empires can be tested for their relevance to the historical and geographical focus of this project. The discourse-oriented format of the Humanities Center, with its interplay between the research of the core group of researchers and

that of an international fellowship program is extraordinarily suited to reanimate global discourse in this field.

07.12.2021 Alba Fedeli, „The intertwined world of the oral and written transmission of sacred traditions in the Middle East“ (AHRC – DFG)

Bio: My work primarily focuses on early Qur’anic manuscripts dating from the 7th to the 10th century CE. I have had the chance to gain first-hand knowledge of collections of these fragments scattered all over the world, from Yemen to Ireland, from Russia to Qatar, Turkey and Egypt. After my undergraduate studies in Classical Philology and Arabic at the University of Milan, I was appointed as librarian and director of the Noja Nosedà Foundation for Arabic and Islamic Studies from 2000 to 2008. I did my doctoral research at the University of Birmingham from 2011 to 2015, focussing on the so-called Birmingham Qur’an and the unexplored story of the Mingana collection. I was a research fellow at the Centre for Religious Studies, CEU, in Budapest and at the John Rylands Research Institute in Manchester from 2015 to 2017 and at FSCIRE Foundation for Religious Studies from 2017 to 2018. Since 2018, I am a Research Associate at the Asia Afrika Institute.

Research: Actually, I am the co-PI of the project on “The Intertwined World of the Oral and Written Transmission of Sacred Traditions in the Middle East” (InterSaME), an AHRC-DFG joined project with Geoffrey Khan at the University of Cambridge. The purpose of this project is to bring together strands of research related to various aspects of the transmission of sacred texts in order to reach a deeper understanding of the intertwined world of the three major religions of the Middle East at their formative periods of development during the early Islamic centuries. The Arabic Qur’an, the Syriac Bible and the Karait Hebrew Bible were all transmitted in oral and written form. The modes of transmission of these traditions converged to a remarkable degree in the medieval Middle East, reflecting close contact between the various religious communities. Thus, InterSaME project aims at exploring the mode of transmission of these texts focusing on their vocalization and punctuation system adopting a comparative approach. The UK team works on Syriac and Karait Hebrew Bible while the German team works on early Qur’anic manuscripts with a strong focus on script systems as a possible mirror of the oral transmission of texts.

14.12.2021 Thomas Eich, „Contemporary Bioethics and the History of the Unborn in Islam“ (COBHUNI) (ERC Consolidator Grant)

Bio: I received my master degree from Bamberg University in 1999. In my doctoral research at Bochum University until 2002 I analyzed the career and networks of Abulhuda al-Sayyadi, a famous Sufi Shaykh in the late Ottoman Empire. In the following years, I worked on contemporary bioethical debates in Muslim majority countries, especially beginning of life issues. Since 2010 I have become increasingly interested in the (exegetical) history of the Qur’an and hadith materials that contemporary Muslim religious scholars are referring to, when debating beginning of life issues.

Research: In the COBHUNI project (ERC consolidator Grant) we have been analyzing the different ways how prenatal life was imagined in texts circulating in Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities at different times and places around the Mediterranean. The presentation

will give an overview of the major findings of the project, which relate to Qur'anic Studies, Hadith Studies, Tafsir Studies, Syriac Studies, and Jewish Studies. In particular, the importance of late antique literature about the biblical Adam story for passages usually understood to refer to the embryo will be shown.

11.01.2022 Hannah-Lena Hagemann, “Social Contexts of Rebellion in the Early Islamic Period (SCORE)“ (DFG Emmy Noether Group)

Bio: I'm an historian of early Islam with a particular interest in historiography and historical memory, rebellion and social strife, Islamic Late Antiquity, the Umayyads, and the history of the Jazīra (Northern Mesopotamia). My PhD project at Edinburgh University examined the portrayal of early Khārijism in the early Islamic historical tradition and so combined my interest in historical writing, Umayyad history, and revolt. Towards the end of my PhD work, I moved to Hamburg to work for Stefan Heidemann's "Early Islamic Empire at Work" project, focusing on the administrative history and geography of the Jazīra. As leader of my own research group now, I'm thrilled to be returning to the Khārijites, and this time from a more positivist rather than purely historiographical perspective.

Research: SCORE studies social contexts of rebellion in the early Islamic period, from the reign of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik (c.692-705 CE) until the defeat of the last major 'Alid revolts in the central lands of the Islamic Empire in c.815-816 CE. This 'long 8th century CE' (c.692-816 CE) saw a high frequency of rebellions, most of which have not been studied in much detail. The studies that do exist also tend to emphasise religious aspects and thus analyse rebels and revolts in the framework of heterodoxy, martyrdom, and millenarianism; the social contexts of rebellion remain poorly understood. In contrast, SCORE's underlying premise is that religion constitutes only one of many markers of identity and thus only one of many factors that influence social action. The group hence focuses on the socio-political and economic dimensions of selected case studies from four categories of revolt: *ashrāfi* rebellions, i.e. those led by tribal notables; revolts that made claims to power in the name of the family of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE); Khārijite rebellions; and non-Muslim/mixed rebellions, using the Armenian revolts of the 8th century CE as an example.

18.01.2022 Maxim Romanov, “The Evolution of Islamic Societies (c.600-1600 CE): Algorithmic Analysis into Social History” (DFG Emmy Noether Group)

Bio: My research focuses on the social history of the premodern Islamic world, the history of the Arabic written tradition, and computational methods and approaches relevant for Islamicate studies. Until recently, I held a joint position as a senior research fellow at the KITAB Project (AKU-ISMC, London) and as a Universitätsassistent of Digital Humanities (University of Vienna). Since 2021, at the University of Hamburg, I am leading a DFG-funded project titled "The Evolution of Islamic Societies (c.600-1600 CE): Algorithmic Analysis into Social History" (EIS1600). To a large degree, this project brings together all my major research interests and fulfils the vision that I had since I was a graduate student: to study all available biographical and historical texts with a holistic computational approach.

Research: Arabic chronicles and biographical collections preserve a plethora of information on long-term environmental and societal processes that shaped and molded Islamic society. These

written sources are the richest “mine” of information and are particularly valuable for the period before the 15th century, for which exceptionally few documents and archives are available. The EIS1600 project undertakes a study of “The Evolution of Islamic Societies (c. 600-1600 CE)” through the computational analysis of these historical texts, which will be treated holistically as a unified corpus of historical information (c.300 titles; 100 million tokens; c.500,000 biographical records). The project’s team will work on identifying and analyzing long-term historical trends through three closely connected case studies: 1) of major ethnic, religious, and professional groups; 2) of dynastic cycles; and 3) of environmental factors. These case studies will be the foundation for a robust synthesis of the evolution of the Islamic world over the period under study. EIS1600 will employ a series of advanced computational methods of text analysis and data modeling that will be the key to discovering, evaluating, and modeling all relevant textual evidence in a holistic, effective, and reproducible manner. Among other deliverables, EIS1600 will produce an open and expandable online research ecosystem, MasterChronicle, which will allow scholars in the field to engage in various modes of close and distant reading of the Arabic historical corpus.